

February 28, 2011

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

FROM: ATTORNEY ROBERT SHEA for *TRANSIT FOR CONNECTICUT*

**PLEASE SUPPORT SENATE BILL 1061—
AAC THE USE OF OFF-DUTY SCHOOL BUSES TO PROVIDE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

In August of 2008, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) issued a report: *"School Buses and Special Needs Transportation – Options for Policymakers."* The CONCLUSION of the NCSL Report provides:

Although school buses represent a significant transportation resource for senior citizens, the disabled and those in rural areas, they sit idle for the part of the day and during months when school is not in session [and all weekends]. States have many options that can help overcome the challenges to allowing school buses to transport the elderly, disabled and those cannot afford a car. States can introduce legislation similar to Minnesota's and New York's, where laws address the lack of transportation in rural communities. States could also follow the lead of California and Iowa

On a personal level, I believe that the use of off-duty school buses – particularly the smaller, special education school buses – is a very good idea.

My 14-year-old son Jeremiah has severe autism and physical disabilities. Jeremiah takes a special ed bus to and from his school in West Hartford. The bus driver is very professional, highly-trained, and he carries a high-level CDL drivers' License. The driver would love to pick up extra work during the middle of the day, at night, and on weekends. The bus is very safe, it has flashing lights, horns, extending safety bars and extending stop signs. The drivers of special ed buses across Connecticut are very nice people who are very experienced in carrying precious cargo – like my son Jeremiah. Many other folks with or without disabilities could safely travel in special ed buses to and from work, medical appointments, shopping centers, religious events, ballparks, museums, etc.

Another benefit of deploying special ed school buses into the public transportation system is that the smaller special ed school buses use less fuel, and presumably exhaust fewer harmful chemicals into the environment than do the much larger school buses and Public Transit buses; and therefore maybe the smaller buses could be substituted into existing transit routes on nights and weekends when the big buses have fewer riders. The smaller special ed buses are also easier to maneuver in tight residential neighborhoods and parking lots, which facilitates more safety.

From a financial perspective, if school buses were deployed in public transit, then the towns should be able to reap some financial benefits from public use of school buses, even if the towns don't own the buses – because the public users of the school buses would pay for the use of the buses. In addition, money will be saved on the purchase of gas for smaller buses, and money will be saved on the purchase of new larger buses.

Also, I respectfully contend that another bill pending before your committee, **Senate Bill 1063 – An Act Providing Funds for Evening Bus Service**, dovetails nicely with Senate Bill 1061, because SB 1063 shows that there is a tremendous demand for additional bus services. Going forward, it would be great if school buses—particularly the smaller ed school buses—could be deployed to help more folks get to and from their destinations.

Thanks very much for your consideration of Senate Bill 1061. Go Buses!!